The Missionary Conference at Lakeville

NINETEEN HUNDRED
AND THIRTY ONE

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IMMEDIATELY after the war, in 1920, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions convened at Princeton a Conference of representatives of its Missions and its own membership and staff to consider its work in all parts of the world. The helpful influence of this Conference soon became obvious. A similar conference was proposed for 1931, as a possible second in a series of ten-year surveys.

The missionary enterprise is probably reexamined and readjusted more frequently than any other single phase of the Church's work, certain critics to the contrary notwithstanding.

THERE is persistent effort to break up the static elements in the movement where they may be hindering its advancement and also to preserve values accumulated through the years. But although this effort is a constant one, it seemed to the Board that certain present day movements might justify a definite and thorough reconsideration of its methods and policies.

A Conference was therefore convened at Lakeville, Connecticut, in the attractive and commodious buildings of the Hotchkiss School, which were placed at the command of the Board without charge, even the dining provisions being made at nominal charges. The first session was held on Saturday evening, June 20th, and the closing session on Tuesday evening, June 30th. The Conference roll included less than 200 names, and at no time were there as many as 200 present. The 26 Missions made their own appointments, naturally missionaries on furlough as far as they counted wise, but with perfect freedom to send missionaries directly from the field if they thought best. This brought 72 members, men and women, in addition to official representatives of the China and India Councils.

At the 1920 Conference there was only one representative of a National Church and he was rather incidentally there. In this 1931 Conference nine Na-

tionals sat as full voting and speaking members—two from China, two from India, one each from Latin America, Japan, Korea, the Near East and the Philippine Islands.

EACH came from an entirely independent and self-governing Church, speaking with entire freedom and frankness. The Board had invited about 50 representative men and women from the home Church, the majority of whom came and gave helpful guidance at points where the home Church is especially involved. Representatives of other Boards in our own and other Churches brought large aid. From the Board membership and staff came about 50 more.

Most of the time the Conference sat in plenary session; part of the time the membership was formed into Groups around five Topics which covered the main problems of present-day Missions. Each day a notable devotional service was held, and each evening a series of addresses occurred, presenting certain aspects of the total work, not for the mere interest of the members but for their guidance in later decisions. The five Groups brought in goodly lists of Findings which were discussed, revised, and adopted for transmission to the Board and the Missions. Since the Conference had no legislative power and was in no sense a Congress, these Findings have still to be considered by the Board and the Missions before they become authoritative, though they gain great weight by reason of their source in such a Conference.

There are few aspects of the work which did not receive some share of attention, though it was clearly necessary to be selective in the extended deliberations.

Friends of the missionary cause may be assured that the methods and policies of the Board and the Missions are not blindly adopted and continued.

THE advance and alteration since the Princeton Conference were often in evidence, and the epoch-making Jerusalem Council was weightily influential in all the discussions. Criticism was not spared at any point, yet it never proceeded from any fundamental doubt of the essential missionary task. A tone of confidence in the ultimate outcome of the work marked the discussions, while there was no blinking the changes in thought and practice of the world which affect the enterprise and demand its frequent reconsideration in method and policy.

Presbyterian ministers and other missionary workers will be glad to note

some instructive conclusions which may be drawn from this ten-day Conference.

1. *The missionary enterprise has certain permanent elements and certain variable ones.* Most criticisms touch the variable elements and should be considered carefully with a view to alterations and improvements. Such criticism as goes to the roots of the work must be met fairly by a renewed revelation of its essential purpose. Changes in world conditions involve changed ways of carrying on the work. Whereas it was formerly conducted *in behalf of* other peoples, it is now in most places to be carried on *in conjunction with* them. The development of institutions and collateral agencies has put a new slant on much of the work. Other modifying influences affect it heavily. But none of these conditions goes to the roots of the case.

> **The enterprise has its fundamental ground in the will and purpose of God in Christ and in the need of the human race for the power and redemption of Christ.**

THE familiar phrase of the Jerusalem Council was quoted a hundred times at Lakeville: "Our message is Jesus Christ." There are a thousand ways of bearing that message and a thousand lines of influence that radiate from it, but its centrality is not to be sacrificed nor its domination lessened without weakening the movement fatally. There were no two minds about this at Lakeville.

It is the permanent nature of this message that ensures its fitness for application at all times. The opening session of the Conference consisted of two studies of changes in American thinking and in world conditions during the past decade which justified the holding of the gathering. A later address which was heard with profound attention said:

> We are living in a time of stupendous changes, when age-old, deeply rooted civilizations must be altered, and the society resting on them must be rebuilt, because of the developing unity of the world and the inescapable necessity of relating their culture, society, economics, politics, education and faith with that of the people of the West with their machines and efficiency and science and religion so that a world-wide society and civilization may be developed. In the world in which they live, the foundations of which have begun to rock, the gospel must be a message to the individual man that he can understand and receive as for himself personally, and that brings light and strength and hope to him as confronted as he is by the perplexities of this changing world at this time.

2. *The most endangered point of the whole work is at the Home Base where constant effort is needed to maintain the sacrificial spirit of adventure which makes the foreign work possible.* The Conference noted with serious concern the recession of missionary interest in the Home Church during recent years, a recession less noticeable in the Presbyterian Church than in some others, but adequate cause for anxiety and heart-questioning in all cases. It was urged that the Home leadership deserves reenforcement from the field and the administrative agencies, not in securing more money so much as in creating deeper interest and increasing intelligence among home Christians. The Conference believed that the Home Church is ready for an appeal based on intelligent knowledge of the needs of the world and that far larger things can be expected of that church both in personnel and in money and in prayer. The home pastors were most urgent in pressing this assurance. Nationals and missionaries alike expressed their deepened interest in the Home Church and its problems as they were presented from time to time. The National brethren learned that the American Church is not supporting Missions out of a superfluity, but that among its supporters are multitudes of sacrificial givers who carry the enterprise constantly on their hearts.

3. *All the lines of present missionary endeavor were surveyed and their values studied—direct evangelism, education, medicine, agriculture, industry, philanthropy, literature.* It was agreed that each is an agency of evangelism, of the presentation of the one gospel of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the whole life for time and eternity. No hesitant note was struck here. None of these lines of endeavor is to be conceived merely as a preparation for some other line. And each must be made worthy of the gospel which it seeks to present. Hospitals must be good hospitals; the Conference declared, under guidance of its several physicians, in favor of two-doctor and two-nurse hospitals, in favor of training schools for doctors and nurses, but also in favor of elementary hospitals of a simple order, and of out-patient programs which involve no permanent hospital at all. In the same way, the Conference was for good schools or no schools at all, for teachers really trained for their work, specialists where they are needed, plain pedagogues where they can serve. It urged that missionaries trained in rural methods shall be found and commissioned, and that no plans be made which exclude the poor or neglect the cultured of all lands. The Conference said:

> We believe that the changing conditions require an especial effort on the part of all workers to be open-minded toward new methods and emphases and that our processes of achieving the supreme aim should be open to change and modification for greater effectiveness. In this connection we urge carefully planned and controlled experi-

mentation along such lines as rural reconstruction and community Christian service, in cities, "mass education," the use of music, newspaper evangelism, etc.

Yet in the heart of these Findings came an urgent word that every missionary sent out should have personal knowledge of Christian work, a clear conviction about and knowledge of the Bible, a definite conviction also regarding the fundamental truth of the Christian message and an experience of its meaning in personal life.

4. *So great and expanding an enterprise has perils of habitude and rigidity and the Conference called for severe judgment regarding all expenditures and programs.* Is the expenditure really needed? Is it proportioned to the total outlay? Does it yield a fair return on the investment? Are the salaries adequate and properly adjusted? Are the allowances justified? Is the furlough system operating to real advantage for the field and for the workers?

Let all friends of the missionary cause comfort themselves with the assurance that careful eyes are watching and multitudes of workers are eager to receive suggestions of wiser use of the consecrated money and lives that are available.

MISSIONARIES should be set free for their work, not in ease and beyond limitation, but without crippling limitations and anxieties. They should be housed reasonably and decently, but without ostentation and extravagance. Administration at home and on the field should be kept within the limits of wisdom and real service, its personnel kept to a minimum for efficiency, their living provided only on the scale required for effective service. Several home pastors told the Conference of their widened realization of the complicated details of missionary administration as the work of the world unfolded before them. Nothing should be done that does not need to be done and no penny should be spent that can be saved for field service.

5. *All intelligent students of Missions know that one of its most pressing issues is the relation of the Mission forces to the growing National Churches.* Here the Conference took strong action, led not more by the National brethren than by the missionaries:

> This Conference rejoices in the self-determination of the younger Churches in every case where they have assumed full ecclesiastical autonomy. Many of the Churches have also undertaken administra-

tive and financial responsibility; some are well on the way to this goal, while others are still in the pioneer stage. We look forward to the progressive assumption on the part of all of the younger Churches of full responsibility for the administration and support of all activities now administered by the Mission or by the Church and Mission in cooperation.

The Conference revealed very clearly that National Churches are at varying stages of development; some do not want larger responsibility than they have now assumed. Wherever this is desired and provision is made for its assumption, the Missions are to welcome the passing of leadership from their hands.

In none of the lands involved are the National believers ready for the withdrawal of missionaries. Instead, from each land came persistent requests for an enlargement of the force. But all lands accented the necessity for the cooperative spirit—work in fellowship with National brethren rather than in oversight of them. The actual program of this cooperation varies with different lands. In only three countries, Africa, Chile and Siam, are the believers connected with the American General Assembly. In all the others entirely self-contained Churches have been established. Almost without exception these Churches are union enterprises, gathering up the results of Presbyterian and other Mission work. Naturally, the more expensive institutional plants, schools, colleges, hospitals, must be taken over by a slower process, though the actual headship of such institutions in some lands has been transferred to Nationals, long before financial responsibility is fully assumed. Among the Nationals at the Conference there seemed less adverse judgment about these institutions than has sometimes been uttered. Their feeling was that the Christian faith could not be fairly represented by unworthy plants or programs, and that the American Church must expect to stand by them until they could assume responsibility for the right kind of institutions of religion. The time will come, of course, when the actual work of *Foreign* Missions will be completed and the work in each land done by believers of that land. But that time has not yet come. The Conference declared:

> The survey which has been made in the sixteen fields in which the Presbyterian Church has been at work, and which represents the combined thinking of the Missions and the National Churches, makes it unmistakeably clear that instead of withdrawing from any of these fields there should be an advance, the National Church assuming larger responsibilities and releasing missionaries and missionary funds for new and challenging opportunities which have not yet been touched.

At another point the Findings say:

> The overwhelming physical needs of all lands and the consequent unrest, the intellectual awakening which is taking place, the responsiveness to influences for weal or woe, which make the present time so tremendously significant and critical, place upon the Church a new and unique obligation to claim these nations for Christ if the forces of evil are not to enter in such a way as to menace the very life of the Church in the world.

6. *When the Conference turned to face the Home Church, its earnestness deepened.* After all, the critical issues lie there.

Missions is more a work of propulsion than of response. The Church is driven out, not drawn out, to the world.

ALL stories of human need lose force if there is not a heart of love to respond, but that heart does not stop to ask if the service is wanted. It is satisfied when it knows that the service is needed; then it wants to help at any cost. The Conference said:

> There is a new note of urgency to be sounded. We cannot delay or it may be too late. We cannot tarry or ground may be lost which will take generations to recover. Even our own weapons of education and methods of propaganda may be turned upon us if we are not fully awake. If we have made mistakes in the past we must correct those mistakes. The situation is critical not only for the missionary cause, but for all that mankind has held dear.

In so vast a situation all mathematical programs seem futile and the Conference made little effort to outline so definite a program that it could be measured month by month. But it did place before the Home Church some urgent appeals which in themselves constitute a definite program:

> In view of the command of our Lord to preach the gospel to every creature, of the appalling need of the world today for Christ, of the breaking down of the old religions and the alarming spread of Communism and Atheism, of the urgent appeals of all our Missions abroad for reenforcements, and of the cordial invitations which the representatives of the National Churches have given us to send more missionaries to labor with them for the evangelization of their countrymen, the members of this Conference are constrained to send forth the following appeal:
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> We call upon the church in America to re-dedicate herself to the accomplishment of her share in the work of world evangelization, especially that with prayer and fasting and consecration of all her

resources, she beseech the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers into His Harvest and to revive His Church throughout the world;

We call upon the young pastors and consecrated young men and women of the Church to offer themselves at once to the Board of Foreign Missions in order that at least 100 fully qualified new missionaries in *addition* to the regular quota may be sent to the field during the coming year, and we appeal to the Church in America to send and support all those who are appointed.

No one at Lakeville counted this an idle appeal; no one thought it an appeal easy to heed. There is no hope except in a deep conviction in ministers, officials, women, men, young people—a conviction that cannot be formed by resolutions but is the outcome of prayer and study, in whose forming all earnest believers must share—a conviction of the meaning and value of Jesus Christ for the whole world.

In this anniversary year the Presbyterian Church needs to be reminded of that fundamental conviction on which the Western Foreign Missionary Society was organized in 1831—that "the Church is a missionary organization the main object of which is to aid in the conversion of the world, and every member of the Church is a member of said organization and bound to do everything in his power towards the accomplishment of this object."

To realize this standard, the intelligent interest of the few and their prevailing prayerfulness must characterize the entire membership of the Church. Only thus can an adequate supply of well equipped and acceptable candidates and sufficient resources be provided for the speedy and effective accomplishment of the missionary aim.

The Conference was clear that the duty of the Home Church could not be performed by gifts of money in subsidies for the employment of National believers and workers or for the support of institutions on the mission field.

We are not prepared to recommend the substitution of Nationals for new missionaries, thus reducing the missionary force and exchanging the gift of life from the sending Church to the gift of money. At the same time, we do encourage the use of well-fitted Nationals whose multiplication gives us great joy, in all services which they can render as well as or better than missionaries, who may thus be released for other service, each Mission being expected to propose to the Board or to arrange for itself such adjustments of appropriations as may prove wise, the main principle of the gift of life rather than of money being maintained.

So long as missionaries are needed, some form of Mission organization

will doubtless be maintained, though leadership and responsibility will increasingly pass to National hands.

THE Conference came to its close as to a climax. After days of discussion of problems and issues and revision of judgments in the long list of Findings, there came an afternoon and evening of rich spiritual experience. The world was unfolded before the members in messages revealing the victories of the grace of God and the opening of doors with increased courage for their entrance. The closing hours were in the spirit of the last section of the Findings, which in turn was based on the earnest appeal which had already been made by the Church of Christ in China for prayer in its behalf.

All glib, easy ways of settling problems and clearing difficulties were seen to be petty and inadequate as the actual world was faced and the Conference found itself thrown back on God as the only source of wisdom and power.

AN eminent and now veteran missionary had led in a remarkable devotional study of 2 Tim. 1:7,—"not the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind," and had made an earnest call for unbroken courage in facing any problems that lie before the missionary movement; there is power enough and love enough and wisdom enough. In this spirit the Findings closed:

> We are impressed by the belief which has been repeatedly expressed in this Conference that we now see beginnings of the answer to the world-wide prayer in connection with the anniversary of Pentecost. This Conference, therefore, calls upon the members of the older and younger churches alike to give themselves anew to individual and corporate prayer, and suggests the following definite subjects:
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> (a) Forgiveness for our neglect in using the power of prayer;
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> (b) Thanksgiving for the evidence and power of the Holy Spirit, and prayer that we may be more sensitive to His guidance;
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> (c) Intercession—For the individual members of all the churches that they may realize their personal responsibility for giving to others the good news of Jesus Christ:
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> (d) —For the youth of the Christian world that they may see the vision of service and respond to its imperative call;

(e) —For the blessing of God upon the forward movements undertaken by all countries and particularly those initiated by this Conference:

(f) —For greater spiritual vitality in facing temptation, tribulation, persecution, discouragement and perplexity; greater determination to follow Christ and be His living witnesses; greater spirit of responsibility in sacrifice; greater faith; closer fellowship with God.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance."

We lay it upon the hearts of our fellow-workers in the Home Church to relay this message to all the people of our Church—in sermon, Bible class, devotional meeting, missionary gathering, conversation, until it shall become part of the inner life and thought of the Church.

THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.
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